

to your

# Health!

VA PAHCS  
Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System



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## Processed Meat & Cancer – What Does It Mean?

*Eileen Stein, MS, RD, Clinical Manager, Nutrition & Food Services*

Recently, news reports linked eating processed meats and red meat with an increase risk of cancer. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified processed meats as a definite cause of cancer, and red meat as a probable cause of cancer.

What does this really mean to your diet? Is this real, or is this



**See Processed Meat – page 4**

## Chair-Based Exercise (C.B.E.) Can Be Enjoyable

*Hank Winkenwerder, PT, Physical Therapy Service*

*“Get on your seat. Sit down and make it happen!”*

Have you ever wanted to exercise, but were afraid of falling with one of those high-energy “dance” aerobics videos? What if you are recovering from leg surgery and want a light workout without injuring yourself? Maybe dizziness, fatigue or other issues keep you from doing standing exercises. If so, do not be discouraged!

Chair-based exercises (C.B.E) may just be what you are looking for.

You can do all types of exercises in a sitting position –

stretching and strengthening, aerobics, or balance exercises. Let us look at a few routines that you may be able to start on right away – in the comfort of your own home (with advice or input from your provider).

First, you will need a sturdy chair with a back. The back can help provide any additional support you may need. Armrests are optional and helpful if balance is also a problem. The important thing is to pick a chair without wheels, and it should not be too low or too high. When you sit in the chair, your knees should be in line with your hips. If you went

**See Chair Exercise– page 2**

jogging, you'd want good supportive footwear. In this case, your chair supports you like a shoe in chair-based exercises!

### Back Stretches

Stretching the back can help many Veterans stand straighter. To stretch the spine and work on balance:

1. Put your arms in front of you, with the palms touching, and turn gently side-to-side.
2. Next, look straight ahead and raise your arms up as high as you can (and are comfortable) over your head.
3. If you want to work on stability, balance, and core strength, do not let your back touch the back of the chair. Instead, try to hold your body steady and straight.

### Hamstring Stretches

People who sit a lot can get very tight behind the knees. The muscles there are known as the hamstrings.

1. Straighten your knee all the way in front of you while sitting up straight in the chair; you should feel a good stretch in the back of the leg.

### Questions or Comments?

If you have any questions or topics you would like addressed in the [To Your Health](#) newsletter, feel free to contact

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2. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds.
3. Repeat three times.

This exercise is often taught when a person is lying down, but doing it in a sitting position is just as helpful and less stressful, especially if you have a lot of weight or difficulty breathing.

### Arm Exercises

Light hand weights or cuff weights of about one to ten pounds can be used to do arm and leg exercises. You can practice reaching out as far as you can to work the back and stomach with these too. Find a weight that you can lift for five to twenty times – whatever amount gives your moving muscles light fatigue. Fewer movements with heavier weights will help build strength. Many more repetitions (30 to 50) with lighter weights will build endurance. Both are needed!

### Leg Exercises

One last easy exercise for your legs is going from a sitting to standing position. Can you do this fairly easily WITHOUT using your arms? If not, you need to strengthen your legs. Practice rising SLOWLY from sitting to standing position while counting to from one to three. Stand tall and then SLOWLY sit back down while counting to three again. It helps to count aloud without holding your breath and use your arms to help only as needed for ease and safety.

You can exercise in time to music at home. If you keep a pace of 6 to 10 motions per minute, without stopping, for 10 minutes, you could get a heart and lung (aerobic) workout equal to light walking. Do not work until you are out of breath though! Instead, exercise to a challenging, but comfortable level.

Chair-based exercise programs, such as “Sit and Be Fit” and “Chair Yoga,” have gained widespread popularity. If you are not convinced that C.B.E. can be helpful, stop by any gym to see how many exercise machines have a seat attached!

After C.B.E., your next goal might be to advance to doing the same exercises safely while standing. Standing exercises can burn 140 calories per hour. They are also exercises that can challenge and help you practice your balance.

See if CBE is for you and ask your health care provider if you have any questions.



# High Blood Pressure: The Silent Killer

*Caroline Ha, PharmD, Pharmacy Service*

Blood pressure is the force of blood that keeps the vessels in your body open. If blood pressure is too high, the walls of the blood vessels will start to stretch beyond what is healthy and damage can occur. This condition is commonly referred to as “high blood pressure”. You may have heard your provider call it “hypertension”. Yet, what many people do not know, is that it is also known as “the silent killer”. It is “silent” because it often has no symptoms until it has done lasting damage to your heart, brain, eyes, and kidneys. If it is not treated, high blood pressure can ultimately lead to heart failure, heart attacks, stroke, vision loss, and kidney disease.

## **What are the risk factors for high blood pressure?**

- **Risk Factors You Cannot Change**

If you are male, African American, or of advanced age, you are at a higher risk for developing high blood pressure. These are risk factors that you cannot fix.

- **Risk Factors You Can Change**

An unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, obesity, and smoking can also increase your risk for high blood pressure. However, these are things that you can fix. You have control over them!

## **How do I reduce my risk for high blood pressure?**

- **Eat Healthy**

Follow the “DASH Diet”. DASH stands for “Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension”. The diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, and low fat dairy products. It is also low in salt. It is designed to help treat and prevent high blood pressure. Speak with your provider or a dietician to help plan your meals!

- **Exercise**

Doing aerobic exercises for just 30 minutes every day can help lower your blood pressure as well. Brisk walking and swimming are examples of aerobic exercises.

- **Weight Reduction**

Obesity is a major risk factor for high blood pressure. Eating healthy and exercising can help with weight loss. In fact, losing weight leads to the greatest decrease in blood pressure!

- **Stop Smoking**

Smoking increases the risk for more than high blood pressure. It increases the risk of all kinds of heart diseases overall. People who quit smoking will have a lower risk for both high blood pressure and heart disease.



## **Do I need to take medications to lower my blood pressure?**

Often, changes in eating habits, physical activity, and weight are not enough to lower blood pressure. Your provider may prescribe one or more medications to help bring your blood pressure down to a healthy level.

## **What is my blood pressure goal?**

This will depend on many things. There are recommended blood pressure goals depending on your age and other disease states. For example, people of all ages with high blood pressure who also have diabetes or kidney disease should target a blood pressure that is less than 140/90 mmHg. On the other hand, people over 60 without diabetes or kidney disease can target a higher goal of less than 150/90 mmHg. The SPRINT Trial is a study that was recently published and has gained widespread attention. It appears to show that lower blood pressure goals may be more beneficial in reducing the risk for heart diseases. However, just like high blood pressure is bad, low blood pressure is also not good. Low blood pressure can cause symptoms such as dizziness, lightheadedness, fainting, nausea, blurred vision, and rapid/shallow breathing, among others. It is important to discuss your blood pressure goal with your provider to see what is best for your health.





another time where the experts will change their minds in a year or two?

### **What is processed meat? What is red meat?**

Processed meat is meat that has been cured, salted, smoked, or otherwise preserved. This includes things like bacon, sausage, ham, hot dogs, bologna, salami, and pepperoni. Red meat includes beef, pork, and lamb.

### **What does it mean?**

While researchers still do not understand exactly how processed meats cause cancer, there is enough evidence to link a diet high in processed meats with an increased risk of cancer. The highest risk is for colon cancer. While that seems a little scary, it may not be as bad as it sounds. Even if you have eaten more than your share of ham sandwiches, your risk of cancer only increases by a small amount. The important thing to remember is that the IARC only looks at whether something could cause cancer, but it does not say how high the risk of cancer is. That sounds like a technicality, but it does make a difference.

For example, processed meat and cigarettes are both classified by the IARC as a definite cause of cancer. They are in the “cause cancer” category. However, they do not necessarily cause cancer at the same rate. While 86% of lung cancer is caused by smoking cigarettes, only 21% of colon cancer is

caused by eating processed and red meat. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the risk of anyone developing colon cancer is about 5%. Other studies show that eating processed meat daily (about 4 strips of bacon or 1 hot dog every day) would increase the risk to about 6%.

However, eating large amounts of red meat and processed meats may not be the healthiest choice.

### **Can I still eat meat?**

No single food is completely terrible for you. Instead of focusing on one single food or one meal that you eat, it is more important to look at your whole eating pattern. The newly released Dietary Guidelines for Americans stress setting up a healthy eating pattern, which includes getting protein from fish, poultry, lean meats, eggs, legumes (beans), nuts and seeds.

Red meat (beef, pork, and lamb) are not bad foods. In fact, they are a good source of iron, zinc, and niacin (one of the B vitamins). The key to red meat is to select lean cuts (like loin or round), and limit your portion size to 3 to 4 ounces (the size of a deck of cards). It also makes sense to limit red meat to 2 to 3 times a week and to fill in with other protein sources the rest of the time.

Processed meats should be eaten rarely, not only because of the increased cancer risk, but because they are usually high in fat and salt. A diet with a lot of fatty and salty foods can lead to other chronic diseases, like heart disease. What does rarely mean? An occasional hot dog at a ball game is fine (unless you have season tickets!), as is the traditional holiday ham. However, if you are eating a bologna sandwich two or three times a week, consider switching that out for a chicken, turkey or tuna sandwich instead.

### **Bottom Line**

Yes, red meat and processed meats increase your risk of cancer. They may also increase your risk of other chronic diseases.

As boring as it sounds, the advice on eating a healthy diet remains the same. Eat a variety of whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and try to get some physical activity every day. Limit foods high in saturated fat, salt, sweets and sugary drinks, and alcohol. Being healthy and preventing both chronic disease and cancer is all about moderation.



# Caribbean Casserole

This tropical-inspired dish is gently spiced for a rich flavor

## Ingredients

- 1 Medium onion, chopped
- ½ Red bell pepper, rinsed and diced
- 1 can (14 ½ oz) Stewed tomatoes
- 1 can (15 ½ oz) Low-sodium black beans, drained and rinsed (or beans of your choice)
- 1 Tbsp Canola oil
- 1 tsp Dried oregano
- ½ tsp Garlic powder
- 1 ½ C Instant brown rice, uncooked



## Directions

- 1) In a large pan, sauté onion and green pepper in canola oil until tender. DO NOT BROWN.
- 2) Add tomatoes and beans (including liquid from both), as well as oregano and garlic powder. Bring to a boil.
- 3) Stir in rice and cover. Reduce heat to simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and let stand for 5 minutes before serving.

## Each Serving Provides:

Calories	185
Total Fat	1g
Saturated Fat	0 g
Cholesterol	0 mg
Sodium	297 mg
Total Fiber	7 g
Protein	7 g
Carbohydrates	37g
Potassium	292 mg

**Prep Time: 10 minutes**

**Cook Time: 10 minutes**

**Yields: 10 Servings**

**Serving Size: 1 cup casserole**

Source: Deliciously Healthy Dinners (<http://hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/healthyeating>)



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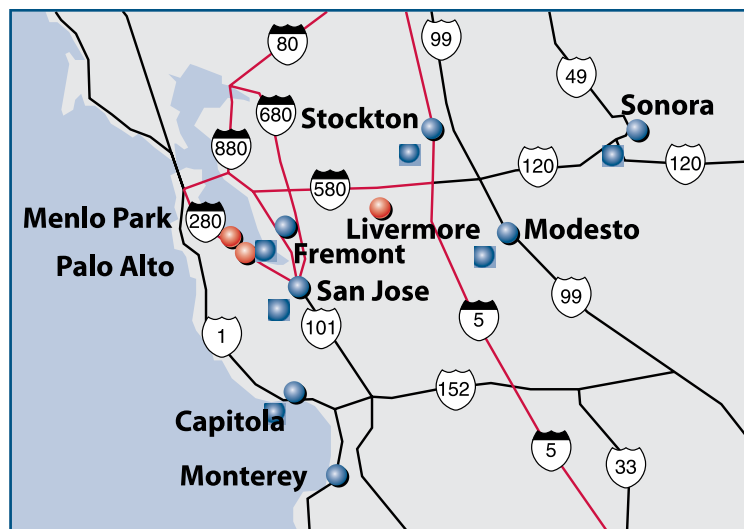
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VA Palo Alto Health Care System Division



VA Palo Alto Health Care System  
Community Based Outpatient Clinic

# Tips for Healthy Living

## Choosing a Home Blood Pressure Monitor

What is important to consider when choosing a monitor?

- The monitor should have clear instructions and be easy to use.
- The cuff needs to fit your arm properly. If the cuff does not fit right, it will not give a correct reading.
- The gauge or display on the monitor should be large enough so you can clearly see it.
- If the monitor comes with a stethoscope, it should fit your ears so you can hear clearly. You will need to know what the sounds mean. Ask your doctor or nurse how to use a stethoscope.

How well a monitor works may depend on how well you know how to use it. Bring your monitor to your doctor or nurse so that he or she can:

- Show you how to use it.
- Check the monitor to make sure it gives the same measurement.

Source: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0041082/>

